

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SREF, CB

SUBJECT: NEWS ABOUT PHNOM PENH AND KOMPONG CHAM AREAS

SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO RECENT CAMBODIAN REFUGEES, PHNOM PENH APPEARS TO BE VIRTUALLY EMPTY AND LIFELESS, AND CONDITIONS ARE DIFFICULT IN KOMPONG CHAM. END SUMMARY.

1. CAMBODIAN REFUGEES HAVE RECENTLY ENTERED THE SURIN REGION OF THAILAND FROM TWO AREAS OF CAMBODIA--PHNOM PENH AND KOMPONG CHAM--FOR THE FIRST TIME TO OUR KNOWLEDGE SINCE THE EARLY DAYS OF KC CONTROL OF THEIR COUNTRY. BECAUSE WE HAVE HAD NO FIRST-HAND INFORMATION ON CONDITIONS THERE, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THEIR STORIES MERIT REPORTING.

2. THE PHNOM PENH SOURCES. ON SEPTEMBER 12 FOUR CAMBODIANS (TWO EX-POLICE, TWO EX-MILITARY) WERE AMONG A GROUP TRUCKED FROM PHNOM PENH TO WEST OF SIEM REAP. FROM THERE THE FOUR CLAIM THEY ESCAPED AND WALKED INTO THAILAND. DESPITE THE RIGOROUS WALK THROUGH ROUGH TERRAIN WITHOUT FOOD, THEY SHOWED ABSOLUTELY NO SIGNS OF A SCRATCH OR A LOSS OF WEIGHT. INTERROGATION BY THAI MILITARY OFFICIALS AND BY FORMER HIGH-RANKING CAMBODIAN POLICE AND MILITARY

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OFFICERS NOW IN THE SURIN MILITARY REFUGEE CAMP CONVINCED

BOTH GROUPS THAT THE FOUR ARE EITHER KC INFILTRATORS OR KC FLEEING CAMBODIA FOR AN UNKNOWN REASON. AS THE EFFORT CONTINUES TO DETERMINE THE TRUTH THROUGH ADDITIONAL INTERROGATION, KNOWLEDGEABLE CAMBODIANS GENERALLY AGREE THAT MOST OF WHAT THE FOUR ARE REPORTING ABOUT PHNOM PENH IS QUITE PLAUSIBLE. AN EMBASSY OFFICER MET WITH ONE OF THEM, A FORMER PHNOM PENH POLICEMAN NAMED UM SAVUTH.

3. SOURCE'S PERSONAL SITUATION. FOLLOWING THE FALL OF PHNOM PENH, UM SAVUTH SAID HE WAS MOVED OUT OF THE CITY TO A VILLAGE NINE KILOMETERS AWAY. HE HAS BEEN SERVING ON A DETAIL PLANTING BANANA TREES INSIDE PHNOM PENH, WHICH HE CLAIMS GAVE HIM FREQUENT LOOKS AT THE CITY. HE SAID KC HAVE BEEN EXECUTING EDUCATED PEOPLE IN HIS VILLAGE FROM VARIOUS WALKS OF LIFE (HE CITED THE EXAMPLE OF THREE TYPISTS).

4. PHNOM PENH CITY. THE CITY AND SEVERAL KILOMETERS OF TERRITORY SURROUNDING IT ON ALL SIDES CONSTITUTE A SPECIAL ZONE INTO WHICH NO ONE IS PERMITTED TO ENTER WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION. INSIDE, PHNOM PENH REMAINS A DEAD CITY, WITHOUT PEOPLE, WITHOUT VEHICLES, WITHOUT INDUSTRY (ONLY FACTORY SOURCE SAW IN OPERATION WAS A TEXTILE FACTORY ON THE ROAD TO POCHENTONG AIRPORT), WITHOUT ANY ELECTRICITY EXCEPT IN THE AREA OF THE RADIO STATION. ASKED IF CAMBODIA'S LEADERS LIVE INSIDE PHNOM PENH, UM SAVUTH SAID IF THEY DID, HE SAW NO SIGNS. CALMETTE HOSPITAL IS NOT IN USE. TOLD OF RADIO PHNOM PENH'S CLAIM THAT BICYCLE REPAIR FACILITIES ARE OPEN, SOURCE LAUGHED AND SAID THERE WAS NOTHING OF THAT TYPE FUNCTIONING. THE KC ARE HAVING BANANA TREES PLANTED EVERYWHERE, INCLUDING THE ZOO (NOW EMPTY OF ANIMALS) AND ALONG THE MAIN BOULEVARDS (WHERE MANY OF THE OLD TREES HAVE BEEN FELLED). THE ONLY FLAGS THE SOURCE SAYS HE EVER SAW WERE RED PENNANTS FLYING IN FRONT OF THE PALACE.

5. SIHANOUK'S ARRIVAL. UM SAVUTH CLAIMS HE WAS AT THE AIRPORT PLANTING BANANA TREES PRIOR TO PRINCE SIHANOUK'S UNANNOUNCED ARRIVAL SEPTEMBER 9. BEFORE HIS TEAM WAS USHERED OUT OF THE AREA, THE SOURCE SAID HE SAW NO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CROWD WAITING TO GREET THE PRINCE, ONLY KC SOLDIERS. THEN, FROM FARTHER AWAY, HE SAW TWO PLANES CARRYING SIHANOUK AND PARTY LAND, WITH A THIRD REMAINING OVERHEAD, CIRCLING.

6. KC PRESENCE. THERE ARE FEW KC TROOPS INSIDE PHNOM PENH; THE LARGEST GROUP HE EVER SAW NUMBERED ABOUT SIXTY. HE ALSO SAID HE SAW A LARGE NUMBER OF SOLDIERS

STRANGELY DRESSED MARCHING TO POCHENTONG THE DAY OF SIHANOUK'S ARRIVAL. WEARING FATIGUES WITH NORTH VIETNAMESE HELMETS, THEY WERE DRESSED DIFFERENTLY FROM ANY OTHERS HE HAD SEEN. UM SAVUTH WAS VERY VAGUE AS TO WHETHER THEY WERE CAMBODIANS OR FOREIGNERS, OR WHETHER HE HAD SEEN ANY OTHER FOREIGNERS.

7. RESISTANCE. SOURCE SAID HE NEVER HEARD OF ANY RESISTANCE. HE NOTED THERE IS OFTEN SHOOTING AT NIGHT FOR A SHORT WHILE BUT SAID HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT IT WAS ABOUT.

8. SITUATION IN KOMPONG CHAM PROVINCE. A COUPLE MADE THEIR WAY OUT FROM THAT AREA INTO THAILAND OCTOBER 1, ARRIVING EMACIATED AND WITH CUT FEET. PUSHED OUT OF THE CITY INTO A NEARBY DISTRICT AFTER KOMPONG CHAM FELL, THE SOURCE HAS BEEN WORKING IN THE RICE FIELDS EVER SINCE. HE KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT EITHER THE TOWN OR LOCAL LEADERS, JUST THAT FOOD IS VERY SHORT, RAINFALL SCARCE, AND MALARIA CONSIDERABLE. KC SOLDIERS ARE ALL VERY YOUNG, RANGING FROM CHILDREN TO TEENAGERS. HE HAS SEEN PEOPLE EXECUTED IN HIS AREA, AND THE EXECUTIONS WERE CONTINUING WHEN HE LEFT.
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